

Readers don't like to read long-winded passages of description, according to Lucille Vaughn Payne in *The Lively Art of Writing*. They don't want pictures slapped all over the pages, but they do want to "see" what a writer means. In other words, they want pictures, ones that flash on almost as fast as action on film. They don't want these pictures to be overly obvious but simply and suddenly there, whammo, straight on, and preferably in motion. In other words: action verbs. You show what you mean with "motion-picture" and "soundtrack verbs."

Not: A spectacular catch was made by Nate during the ball game.

But: Nate raced to the backfield, turned, leaped; the ball smacked solidly into his glove. OR Nate hurled himself forward, raised his gloved hand as he hit the dirt, and scooped the ball out of the air.

Not: A cat was seen crossing the yard. (passive)

But: A cat streaked across the yard. (active)

Not: The sound of footsteps was heard in the hall. (passive)

But: Footsteps thudded along the hall. (active)

Exercise: Rewrite the sentences below using one of more verbs that increase the visibility and/or the sound of the motion suggested. DO NOT ADD adjectives or adverbs.

1. He sat down.
2. The puppy had a fine time playing in the park.
3. The wind made a loud noise.
4. He left the room in a tremendous hurry.
5. She put the papers in her purse.
6. The garden tiller worked quite efficiently on the hard, rocky soil.
7. She seemed to be feeling very happy when she came into the room.
8. The old man went slowly across the street.
9. The dog lay down on the rug.
10. The boy drank the lemonade very fast.

#### **ANIMATE the INANIMATE:**

The subjects in the sentences above are capable of movement. The challenge comes to animate the inanimate.

Dull: The I-25 exit to northbound Broadway is on Lincoln Street.

Improved: The I-25 exit to northbound Broadway swoops down to Lincoln Street.

From: The house was brightly lighted.

To: The house bloomed with light.

From: The fog was so thick that the city was invisible.

To: The city swam in fog.

Exercise: Animate the following sentences.

1. The room was suddenly filled with loud laughter.
2. He finally let the extent of his anger be seen.
3. A startling report was given to the students by the principal.
4. The crowd made disrespectful noises.
5. He made a loud sound indicating disbelief.
6. It was a nice fall day.
7. Pictures hung on the walls.
8. She was so super sweet it made you sick.
9. His spirits were low.
10. Fish were being fried in the skillet.

**“Direct your reader”** — Movie directors know how to reveal a large amount of information with single details in close focus. A typical shot: a young man standing on a street corner. The camera gives you a general idea of what he looks like, but the director wants you to know as quickly as possible a great many other details about his young man. So , the camera moves in to show you certain details in close-up: first, the young man’s broken-down shoes; then a button dangling from the coat by a thread; then a tattered paperback thrust into a frayed pocket, with the title of the book visible, *Wild Birds of America*. Not one details appears by accident. The director chose each one to tell you something. The audience can now begin to speculate about this character from these specific details. While verbs give you the “action shots,” specific details supply the “stills”—the camera briefly at rest on a particular object. Look at the difference in these pictures.

Not: He like to read the Bible.

But: A worn Bible lay in his gnarled hand.

Not: She looked like a rich woman.

But: A four point diamond glistened on her left hand, while a ruby glowed warmly on her right. Her clothes had the cut that pronounced, “Money, money, money.”

Lights...camera...Add action to the following sentences.

1. He looked nervous.
2. He was a very interesting looking young man.
3. The yard looked terrible.
4. She was crazy about candy.
5. The crowd was angry.